Assessment verbs: definitions and examples

Introduction

Assessment verbs are verbs that instruct – they tell you what to do. The assessment verb in an assignment determines the type of answer you are expected to give. For example, the two statements below relate to the same subject and contain similar wording, but use different assessment verbs:

1. **Describe** techniques for promoting positive mental wellbeing.
2. **Discuss** techniques for promoting positive mental wellbeing.

Although the statements are similar, they require different responses:

- A **description** of flow production will focus on its key features such as the continuous movement of items through the production process, high levels of automation, and the production of large numbers of identical goods.
- A **discussion** of flow production will include descriptive elements, but will also explore the history, advantages, disadvantages, benefits, and consequences of this production process.

The second statement is more challenging and requires a more in-depth response. Understanding and responding correctly to the assessment verbs in assignment briefs is, therefore, essential for achieving higher grades.

This guide provides definitions for a long list of assessment verbs. It is split into two parts:

- **Part 1** lists 15 key assessment verbs that you are most likely to find in assignment briefs, such as analyse, compare, describe, discuss, evaluate, explain etc. This part of the guide includes short examples to illustrate the differences between these verbs.
- **Part 2** provides definitions for 40 less commonly used assessment verbs.

Assessment verbs are often included in a framework that starts with verbs like *identify* and *describe* that simply require knowledge. Higher level verbs like *analyse* and *compare* require more skills and abilities than just remembering facts. The verbs at the highest level are the most challenging. This level includes verbs like *evaluate*, *justify* and *interpret*.

Part 1: Key assessment verbs

This part of the guide includes definitions and examples for the assessment verbs you are most likely to find in your assignment briefs. All the examples will be about a table (furniture) so you can easily compare the differences and similarities between them.

Analyse

Definition

Examine the subject in detail by methodically breaking it down into relevant parts based on the question being asked. The purpose of an analysis is to produce a supported argument or conclusion on a subject by showing how its main elements, features or ideas are related and why they are important.

Example

Analyse the differences between a table and a desk.

Tables and desks are fundamentally similar pieces of furniture: they both provide a large, flat surface raised above the ground most often on vertical uprights or legs, although podiums or wall brackets may be used instead. In both cases, the most common shape for the flat surface is a rectangle, but both also come in a variety of shapes. The key difference between tables and desks, however, is in what they are used for: tables are most often associated with home life while desks are used for work and education. As a result, desks are more likely to include built-in storage space such as drawers, while tables come in a wider range of heights: you always need to be able to sit or stand at a desk, but that is not always true of tables, such as coffee tables.

Assess

Definition

Provide a reasoned judgment about the value of the subject matter. Your judgement should be informed by relevant facts and take a range of views into account rather than just giving your opinion.

Example

Assess the suitability of the table you have chosen for a young family.

This solid wood, fold-away table offers many practical advantages for a young family compared to a standard dining table, although it is not without compromises. Fully extended, the table can comfortably sit four adults, while works well as a breakfast table or impromptu desk with just one leaf extended, perfect for laptop conference calls, homework, or finger painting. Fully folded away, with the four collapsible chairs stored inside, it tucks away in any corner. It is not as good looking as some tables, the chairs are not the most comfortable and it is £20 more expensive than similarly sized tables, but I would still recommend this practical, well-built table with space-saving features to young families who live in smaller houses or flats.

Compare / Compare and contrast

Definition

Identify the similarities and differences between two things. Consider the effects and consequences of these similarities and differences and, if relevant, consider which is preferable or most suitable.

Example

Compare a coffee table and an occasional table.

Coffee tables and occasional tables are both small tables that are designed to complement the furniture in living rooms, lounges and sitting rooms. They are low tables that can be reached easily by someone sitting on a sofa or the floor. Coffee tables are usually placed in the middle of the room or in front of the main seating area, while occasional tables can be placed anywhere in the room. Occasional tables are also more likely to be used in other rooms of the house, like the bedroom. Although both types of table are small, coffee tables are generally larger than occasional tables and are more likely to include some type of storage, often a shelf for storing magazines and books. There is no clear definition of what makes one table a coffee table and another an occasional table; it depends on how the individual uses the table. It could even be said that the name 'occasional table' refers to any small, low table that you can't sit at, which would mean coffee tables are a type of occasional table.

Define

Definition

State or describe the meaning, scope or nature of something in a precise way.

Example

A table is a piece of furniture with a flat surface that stands above ground level supported by one or more legs. It provides a level surface for eating, writing or working at.

Describe

Definition

Give detailed information about the subject matter that includes relevant characteristics, qualities or events.

Example

A table has a flat surface supported on one or more legs. The size and height of the table will vary according to its purpose: dining tables, for example, are tall enough and large enough for two or more adults to sit at to eat, while coffee tables are low so they can be reached from a sofa. Tables are often rectangular, but other shapes like ovals and circles are also common. The are many styles and uses for tables.

Discuss

Definition

Give a detailed account of the subject matter that addresses a range of views or opinions and how they relate to one another.

Example

Discuss the purpose of a dining table.

The basic purpose of any dining table, no matter its size, is to provide a flat surface from which a number of people, who are sitting on chairs, can eat. Some people only ever use their dining table as a dining table, although in some cases the main purpose of a large, expensive dining table is to act as a status symbol. Returning to more practical considerations, even a small dining table provides a large, useful area for undertaking many other tasks, including work, meetings, hobbies and storage which raises the question: is a dining table defined by its original purpose or the use to which it is put? In other words, is a dining table that is used mainly as a work desk still a dining table? The answer will surely vary from person to person.

Evaluate

Definition

Consider a range of information, evidence, arguments and opinions about a subject in order to come to a reasoned, qualitative judgement or conclusion about that subject.

An evaluation must look at what is being evaluated and how it works, and at the positive aspects of the subject and its limitations. The relevance of a topic can also be considered. Any comments or views expressed as part of the evaluation must be supported with examples, and the final judgment or conclusion must be based on criteria that can be justified from the evidence presented.

Example

Evaluate the table that you have chosen.

I have chosen to buy a small rectangular breakfast/dining table for my kitchen made of wood. For the same price I could have bought a round, glass-topped metal table. While I preferred the overall look of the metal table, I decided on the wooden table for a number of practical reasons. First and foremost, the shape of the table makes it more stable than its metal counterpart, which matters when my young children are running around and playing. Wood is also a much safer table surface than glass if the table does fall over. The glass surface would have been easier to clean and less susceptible to scratches and stains, but it would also show up the inevitable mucky fingerprints far more than the wood. If it did get scratched or cracked, the glass would need to be repaired by a professional or replaced, while I can easily sand down and re-varnish the wooden tabletop. If I did not have young children, I would have chosen the glass-topped

metal table for purely aesthetic reasons, but for now the sturdy wooden table is the best option for my kitchen.

Examine

Definition

Carefully inspect or look at the subject in detail.

Examine is closely related to *describe* but goes further and requires more detail. An examination may also draw conclusions based on the detailed description of the subject.

Example

Unusually, this small nest of hand-made tables contains only two tables rather than three. The tables are made of North Indian Rosewood (also known as sheesham), which is hard wearing but cheaper than the teak wood often used in high-end furniture. Small blemishes in the wood give the tables more character than mass produced furniture. The wood is naturally a dark golden brown, a colour emphasised by the wax polish that needs to be applied once or twice a year to keep the tables in good condition. The tables themselves have solid tops that are nearly 2cm thick and sturdy, square-profile legs that curve slightly inwards and then out again. Additional strength is provided by bracers between each pair of legs near the base. The are, of course, only three bracers on the larger table to allow its smaller companion to slide underneath. Standing just 50cm tall with a footprint 60cm by 40cm, these occasional tables would make an attractive and useful addition to any living room.

Explain

Definition

Make the subject clear or understandable to a reader by providing detailed, relevant information that relates it to a larger context (how it is used, why it exists etc).

Example

As upright tool-users, humans have probably used raised platforms to complete certain tasks for tens of thousands of years. Tables as we understand them – a piece of furniture with a flat surface supported by legs or other means – have been in use since at least the 7th century BCE. Archaeological evidence shows that the Egyptians, Babylonians and Assyrians all used tables made of wood or metal. By the Middle Ages, large dining tables were widely used, though often basic in construction with large planks resting on trestles allowing the tables to be easily dismantled. The first dining tables with fixed legs appeared in the 1400s, while in the 16th century draw tables were invented allowing the table to be expanded by sliding apart two leaves on runners to create space for additional leaves; a method still used by some extending tables today. Technological innovations like these allowed for style as well as function in the design of

tables, with taste and status becoming more apparent. This trend continues today with tables made from a wide range of materials in many different styles and for many different purposes.

Identify

Definition

Recognise, list or name the subject.

Example

The object with a flat top and four legs is a table.

Investigate

Definition

To systematically inquire into a subject to discover and examine facts about it.

Example

The tabletop is round and made of glass supported on a collapsible stainless steel frame comprising of four diagonal legs that cross over beneath the centre of the table at a pivot mechanism that allows the table to be folded flat. The legs extend beyond this crossover point to form a square base. The glass tabletop has a milled edge rather than a metal frame. It is 90cm in diameter and it stands 74cm tall when unfolded. The table can seat up to four people, although space will be limited if they are eating from full dinner plates and have drinking glasses. For meals, the table is better suited for two or three people.

Justify

Definition

Give a reasoned explanation for actions or decisions made.

Justify questions are similar in many ways to *evaluate* questions, but do not go as far. In both types you need to come to a reasoned conclusion, but a *justify* question has a narrower, more specific focus.

Example

Justify your choice of table.

I have chosen to buy the small rectangular breakfast/dining table instead of the round, glass-topped metal table for practical reasons. The wooden table is more stable than the glass one, both because of its shape and the position of its legs. This is important in a house where young children are playing. If they knocked over the glass table, it could topple and smash, which is another concern I do not have with the wooden table. In addition, while the glass table would be easier to clean, it would also need to be cleaned

more often because it would show every mucky fingerprint. For my kids' safety and my own peace of mind, therefore, I have chosen to buy the wooden table.

Outline

Definition

Give an overview of the main facts, points or arguments relating to the subject matter without going into detail.

Outline requires more information than an *identify* question but less detail than a *describe* question.

Example

A table is a piece of furniture. It has flat surface that is supported above ground level by one or more legs. Tables come in many sizes and shapes. Dining tables are large enough for groups of people to sit at in order to eat, work, do hobbies etc. Occasional tables are smaller and lower and usually positioned so someone sitting in a comfortable chair can easily reach items placed on the tabletop.

Review

Definition

Look back over the subject matter or activity to determine what was effective and what wasn't in order to identify changes that would improve the outcome.

Example

Review dining tables.

Dining tables come in many sizes, a few different shapes and styles, various materials, and a wide range of prices. Most large dining tables, for six or more people, are rectangular and made of wood. Smaller dining tables may be made of wood, metal, glass or even plastic and are mostly rectangular or round. Modern design and production techniques mean that there is a broad choice of dining tables for consumers to choose from, whatever their budget and however much space they have. Unlike chairs, however, which come in a huge variety of forms, designs and styles, the fundamental purpose of a dining table – to provide a flat, stable surface at which groups of people can sit and eat – does constrain what is possible in terms of table design.

Summarise

Definition

To take the key points from information, arguments or conclusions that have already been presented and provide a short overview written in your own words.

Example

Summarise your research on tables.

My research shows that there are many types of tables that are used for a wide range of purposes. Every table provides a flat surface supported on one or more legs, but they vary in size, shape and material depending on what they are intended or actually used for. Tables have been used since at least the 7th century BCE. In more recent centuries, innovations and new materials turned the table into a universal, and indeed, essential piece of furniture.

Part 2: Other assessment verbs

This part of the guide provides brief definitions for 40 other assessment verbs that you may see in your study materials or assignments.

Term	Definition
Apply	Explain how existing knowledge can be linked to new or different situations or in practice.
Calculate	Find the answer to a numerical problem and show all your working out.
Carry out	Complete a task or activity.
Clarify	Explain the information in a clear, concise way.
Classify	Organise according to specific criteria.
Collate	Collect and present information arranged in sequence or logical order.
Conduct	Carry out.
Critically assess	Examine in detail and consider the similarities and differences and identify the positive aspects and limitations.
Consider	Ponder, contemplate, study in order to make a decision.
Co-ordinate	Organise people, information or a situation so that there is an effective outcome.
Demonstrate	Apply skills in a practical situation or show an understanding of the topic.
Determine	To find out or decide which information is most relevant, usually by following a set of procedures that you are expected to know.
Develop	To identify and build on a topic, plan or idea.
Diagnose	Identify the cause based on valid evidence.
Differentiate	Identify the differences between two or more things.
Distinguish	Explain the difference between two or more items, resources, or pieces of information.
Draw conclusions	Identify outcomes, which could lead to recommendations.
Engage	Work in conjunction with, or work together with, or ensure participation in.

Term	Definition
Estimate	Give an approximate decision or opinion using previous knowledge or experience.
Extrapolate	Identify relevant points using the information available.
Illustrate	Give clear information or description with examples (e.g.: spoken, written, pictures, diagrams).
Implement	To fulfil, perform or carry out a plan, action, task or procedure.
Interpret	Explain the meaning.
Judgment	Form an opinion or make a decision based on evidence.
Listen	Hear what is said.
Monitor	Watch the progress of.
Plan Organise	Information in a logical way using an appropriate format.
Perform	Think about and organise information in a logical way.
Prepare	Get ready.
Produce	Carry out or do.
Take an action	Follow an instruction.
Provide	Make, create, bring or find through learning or creative ability.
Record	Preserve in writing or by other methods.
Recognise	Acknowledge validity - know from before.
Report	Produce a detailed account or statement describing an event, situation, or activity.
Reflect	Learners should look at their action or experiences or learning and think about how this could inform their future action, learning or practice.
Respond	To take action. Reply or answer.
State	To express a piece of information, often a fact, in precise, unequivocal terms.
Supervise	Have responsibility for overseeing people's performance whilst offering support.
Undertake	Agree to take on and carry out the task.